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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Soviet Expectations for the US Presidential Election

Summary

Although the Soviets are not unanimous in their assessment of the likely outcome of the US presidential election, the majority view appears to be that the Reagan administration will remain in office for 5 more years. This belief presumably has been behind the Soviets' retreat from the extreme hard line they appeared to be considering immediately after the suspension of arms control talks, when there were signs that they might place a general freeze on bilateral relations. A readiness to continue cooperation on working-level issues, and hints at willingness to resume substantive exchanges in the field of arms control, suggest that the Soviets now are seeking to preserve a foundation for constructive relations if the administration is reelected, while doing nothing to enhance its prospects by appearing conciliatory. It is a fine line to walk, and one likely to result in conflicting signals in the months ahead.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted]
 Strategic/Internal Branch, Current Support Division, Office of
 Soviet Analysis, and has not been coordinated outside that
 office. Questions and comments should be addressed to the Chief,
 Current Support Division [redacted]

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2. This assessment, along with a decision that an image of Soviet obduracy was damaging to their battle for international opinion, appears to be leading the Soviets to retreat from the extreme hardline position apparently under consideration immediately after the suspension of INF and START talks. At that time, the US Embassy in Moscow noted the simultaneous absence from public view of a number of leading Americanologists and concluded that a major review of policy toward the US had taken place. The Embassy noted signs that this review had resulted in a decision to create the impression of a complete breakdown in the bilateral dialogue. The reassessment, however, apparently resulted in other conclusions. By the end of December the Soviets had proposed a resumption of bilateral negotiations on improving the direct Moscow-Washington communications link, and early in January they agreed to continue bilateral talks on nuclear nonproliferation. These developments indicated a willingness at least to preserve the dialogue on working-level issues.

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3. More recently, signs have been growing that the Soviets are prepared to resume substantive exchanges in the field of arms control, despite their inflexibility in public on conditions for resuming INF talks.

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- Shortly before Andropov responded in Pravda to the President's speech of 16 January, Ambassador Dobrynin told a correspondent of the Boston Globe that a limited, strategic arms control agreement might be negotiable by mid-summer.
- The day Andropov's response appeared, Zagladin told a correspondent of the Washington Post that the USSR would "respond to any realistic or constructive step" by the US.

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4. These developments suggest that the Soviets have decided to preserve the basis for a constructive dialogue with the US administration in anticipation of its reelection. At the same time, [redacted] the Soviets are determined not to do anything to enhance the President's reelection prospects. The Soviets are therefore stating a willingness to talk, while insisting it is up to the US to make the next move and being careful not to suggest that the US administration's policies have forced them to soften their line or abandon previously held negotiating positions. This dual aim is likely to result in conflicting signals during the months ahead, as limited constructive gestures by the Soviets, and affirmations of their willingness to maintain a dialogue, alternate with assertions that US-Soviet relations and the international situation in general have been brought to a low state by past words and deeds of the administration. The Soviets probably are prepared to respond cautiously to any further overtures from Washington, but for now will avoid significant concessions of their own.

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